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Audience members at the Interoperability Montana Retreat participate in a game of SCIP Jeopardy

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Interoperability Montana Uses **Jeopardy** to Promote Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan

A simulated game of Jeopardy may seem like an odd way to teach a group about Montana's Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP). But that's exactly what took place on April 24 in Billings, Montana with more than 100 participants. Audience members consisted of county commissioners; local fire, police, and sheriff's representatives; Disaster and Emergency Services coordinators; State employees; and representatives from the National Governors Association and the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC).

The Interoperability Montana (IM) Project sponsored the retreat to inform stakeholders about the IM Project and solicit ideas to move it forward. Questions and answers in the Jeopardy game were based on the SCIP and the IM Project. Participants were advised to study the SCIP in anticipation of the Jeopardy game. Categories consisted of Acronyms, Sites, IM History, Potpourri, Statistics, and Graphics, to name a few.

"It served as a great ice breaker," said Chris Christensen, Montana's Public Safety Services Bureau Chief. "Participants had a lot of fun formulating the correct questions to the answers that were presented."

Before the two-day retreat, the SCIP was placed on the IM Project's website (<http://interop.mt.gov>) and the link was advertised in the retreat brochure. At the event, 50 printed copies of the plan were provided and quickly picked up by participants. In addition, 100 copies of

the plan were distributed on CD. Several working sessions took place to inform participants about progress and discuss issues related to the SCIP and the IM Project.

About the IM Project

Montana's emergency communications system is being developed from the bottom up, rather than as a State-imposed mandate. Federal, State, county, local, and tribal agencies formed eight voice consortia to assist with the funding and deployment of the IM Project. In addition, a ninth consortium (Mobile Data Terminal Consortium) was created to develop an interoperable mobile data system.

Created through a Memorandum of Understanding in November 2005, the IM Project Directors (IMPD) board consists of project directors elected from each consortium. The board provides direction in the development of the connected, statewide communications system. Three State agencies (Highway Patrol, Department of Transportation, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation) were added to the board in December 2006.

"Montana is fortunate to have public safety professionals representing 56 counties and seven tribal nations working diligently within their consortia to meet the goals of interoperability," said IMPD Chair and Glendive Chief of Police Alan Michaels. "The IM Project is a cooperative effort with many partners, including a private railroad company," said Mi-

chaels. "This collaboration makes sense because no single agency could take on the enormous costs involved in building a system of this size. You've got to understand that Montana is the Nation's fourth-largest State and it shares a 550-mile border with Canada."

The IMPDs are assisted by members of the IM Technical Committee (IMTC), which consists of representatives from each consortium and State agencies. The IMTC was instrumental in providing input into Montana's SCIP and developing its Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Investment Justifications.

The IMPDs approved the final version of the SCIP on November 6, 2007 and the plan was submitted to OEC on December 3, 2007. Final approval of Montana's SCIP and its PSIC Investment Justifications was received on April 4, 2008. "Great progress has been seen, primarily due to leadership from the local level," said Christensen. "The SCIP approval was a critical milestone in our partnership to advance interoperability."

Chief Michaels added that "Events such as the IM Retreat—along with the lively Jeopardy game—help keep the SCIP in the forefront of people's awareness. I think Montana's grassroots process will continue to be effective in implementing interoperability systems and developing workable solutions based on achievements and 'lessons learned' to date."

For more information, please visit <http://interop.mt.gov>.